

SIS2¹

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Welcome. Thank you for coming. I must apologise, first of all, that our chairman is not here. He literally is unable to be here for this meeting. You have still got four of us, which I'm sure is adequate.

We have, as I understand it, up to an hour and a half for this session, if that's okay by you.

If I can just run through the opening formalities that we go through with all witnesses, as you know, the session is being held in private because we recognise that much of the evidence in the areas we wish to cover will be sensitive within the categories that we have set out in the Inquiry's protocol on sensitive information, for example on grounds of international relations or national security, and in particular we will want to use this session to explore issues covered by classified documents.

We will apply the protocol between the Inquiry and HMG regarding documents and other written and electronic information in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public, either in the Inquiry report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

¹This officer is referred to as SIS2 throughout the Inquiry's documentation.

If other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents nor engages any of the categories set out in the protocol on sensitive information, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry secretary's letter to you.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events. We are, of course, checking what we hear against the papers we have access to and which we are still receiving.

Finally, I would remind you that you will later on be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the evidence you have given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons, we have to hold the transcript in our offices upstairs in this building and would ask you to come in here. You can have access to the transcript whenever you wish to in order to review it.

One further question I would just like to put at this stage is simply about your designation. How do you now describe yourself and your past career for public purposes in the work that you are now undertaking?

SIS2:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's very helpful. That's the factual position.

Perhaps I could now turn to Sir Martin Gilbert to open the questions.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I wonder if you could help us to start with with some aspects of the chronology.

When did you first become aware that the US focus was on achieving a regime change in Iraq?

SIS2: Very difficult to say with any confidence when that was. I must confess I haven't checked that [REDACTED]. But I think that it became evident, probably in the summer of 2002, that we were dealing -- that this was the situation that was starting to emerge from Washington.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was it thought that this was likely to lead to military action?

SIS2: I think it rapidly became clear [REDACTED] that this was the intention of the Bush administration.

[REDACTED] The indications [REDACTED] from Washington were very much that this was an exercise in regime change.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And in terms of the possibility of the United Kingdom becoming involved?

SIS2: Well, that of course took much longer to become clear, and of course, in a technical sense, it really didn't happen -- that decision was not taken until very late in the day, after efforts had been made to secure

a second UN resolution, and I think it is entirely truthful to say that until late in the day it was not clear that the United Kingdom would be irrevocably committed to this enterprise in a military sense.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was your understanding of the different factions within the United States administration towards the United Nations route that was determined by the President in September 2002?

SIS2: Well, there was always a faction within the Bush administration that was fairly viscerally disinclined to involve the United Nations in anything at all, and the people who espoused that route were well documented, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and other members [REDACTED]

But I think -- sorry, I didn't fully answer your question. I think the message coming out of the White House in respect of this was that there was recognition of the case made by the United Kingdom to pursue a second resolution, and I think probably the best way to put this was that the White House registered a nil obstat.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

SIS2: [REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

² Sir Martin asked what authority SIS required before taking operational activity. The witness explained that this would depend on the nature of the activity; obviously the first thing would be to check that the proposed activity was consistent with the Intelligence Services Act 1994 and was therefore legally permissible. In most circumstances, it would also be necessary to make a submission to Ministers for authority

SIS2: [REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

SIS2: Well, that obviously comes into two categories. The first was to ramp up intelligence collection on the Iraqi WMD programme. Obviously SIS had been to some degree collecting on that programme, but as I think the Butler Inquiry makes abundantly clear, for a long period of time during the 1990s there was little that SIS could do, given the pervasive UN inspector presence in Iraq.

The other area where SIS began to make plans was in terms of operational intelligence support in the event that it did come to a military conflict involving British troops. [REDACTED]

³ Sir Martin asked about SIS activity before the outbreak of hostilities.

[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally from me, who in our system was aware of the SIS activities?

SIS2: Well, the Foreign Secretary would certainly have been, and I imagine to some degree, but not necessarily the same degree, the Defence Secretary. At that point, I think, most of the activity that was being undertaken was probably of the kind that would not naturally come to his attention.

I think the Prime Minister was taking a very keen interest at that point already in what SIS (a) might be doing and (b) could do to assist HMG to manage the situation.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would it be fair to say at this point in the spring/summer of 2002 that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: I don't think that is actually the correct characterisation of the situation. I think the situation, as I understand it, is that SIS had some clear requirements laid upon it, the ones I have already mentioned: the need to improve very quickly collection activities on the Iraqi WMD programme; clearly the need to make necessary preparations for intelligence support for military activity. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I think it might be helpful at this stage -- maybe we should have done this earlier -- if you could just give us a broad description of how the board functioned. It's a fairly small board. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

To what extent would the board have regularly discussed and been briefed on, given that you all had different areas of operation, the way that the Iraq picture was unfolding?

SIS2: Well, the Board met at regular intervals. I think we were a weekly board, and certainly we would have a fixed agenda, a lot of which would be about either strategic management or housekeeping issues. But an issue like this obviously was on the agenda. There was discussion about it from a fairly early stage.

But I'm not sure that we ever really looked at this from an appropriate risk management perspective. I don't think we ever really got out our risk register and said, okay, this is an area where we as an organisation are actually at risk. This is a reputational issue for us and we need to think through very carefully how we handle ourselves in this regard. That's something I would refer to.

But there's no question that the board was regularly briefed on Iraq. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] but at the same time one has to bear in mind that on the political arena, so to speak, things began to move very quickly indeed, and I think it's true to say that there were

a number of occasions where we as a board effectively found ourselves facing a fait accompli in terms of some decisions that were made, rather than having the opportunity fully to debate them before they were made.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Fait accompli in terms of what sort of decision? Decisions that you would have normally made yourselves or were made elsewhere and presented to the board, or were they made by somebody on the board and presented but not for debate?

SIS2: I'm talking predominantly about conversations that the then chief of the service had with the Prime Minister and others in Number 10, which obviously could not have been the subject of pre-arranged deliberation that the chief had to make, as it were, there and then. I'm not bringing this as a criticism because, as I said, the reality is that things were moving very fast, and we didn't, I don't think, have the luxury of an opportunity to manage every aspect of this by committee. But it did mean that occasionally we would find ourselves being told, well, I have spoken to the Prime Minister and this has happened or that has happened, we are going to do this, we are going to do that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. You made a couple of points there I would like to come back to nearer the end, but this is very helpful in terms of setting the context for our questions. If I could just ask one more and then I'll hand on.



██████████ where would Iraq have featured from, say, the middle of 2002 onwards?

SIS2: It went up the scale dramatically. I think in WMD terms, Iraq had been relatively low down the scale of preoccupations. The main focus of concern at that point was, firstly, the Iranian nuclear programme, which was a matter of top priority; the AQ Khan nuclear black market, and the realisation that after years of dabbling ineffectually in an indigenous nuclear programme, Libya had opted for an engagement with the AQ Khan nuclear supply network that made a Libyan programme more of a preoccupation than it otherwise would have done. So there there were three major WMD preoccupations on which we had to focus.

I think, as I said, Iraq was in one sense a legacy issue. The collection effort around Iraq was focused more, I think, on making sure that we understood where Iraqi capabilities rested at the time of sanctions, so that once the programmes began to resume, we would have a very clear idea of what the baseline was from which that resumption would take place.

In political terms, I think relatively little focus was devoted to collection on Iraq prior to that point. This was a function of considerations --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: From this point the board was having to gear up SIS --

SIS2: Absolutely.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- for obviously a very major effort on

Iraq, which in the course of the second half of 2002 perhaps became the board's highest priority?

SIS2: A pretty constant preoccupation, if not the highest priority, yes. I think that it was a dominant feature of our discussions.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we can just stay on what you have just said, on the priorities. There was, as I recall, a JIC report done in early 2002, an analysis done on the priorities and concerns about nuclear proliferation. So what you have suggested then was more or less Iraq right down the list.

Did SIS express a view -- it must have meant a diversion of effort and resource, given this was a high priority generally -- about the diversion of energy and resource to a country that actually, strictly speaking, was quite low down the list?

SIS2: No, I don't think we did. I think that's not how the SIS culture operates. SIS is very much a task-driven organisation that responds to requirements, and is a relatively, and by design, process-light organisation.

So when the requirement to deal with a much increased Iraqi requirement came into effect, I think we just swallowed hard and diverted the resources that we judged necessary. I don't think we -- as far as I'm aware, we never formally registered a concern about the resource implications of this.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Informally?

[REDACTED]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So because these were not seen as convincing as pieces of information, is that why this information wasn't drawn to the attention of the Butler Committee?

SIS2: I wasn't aware that it had not been.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Our information is that the list was given, but not specifically drawn to their attention.

SIS2: I can't actually recall whether that was the case or not. My understanding [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was that the aim was to provide all the information to the Butler Committee that they required or was judged relevant. There was certainly no decision that I was aware of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to withhold any information from that Commission. I certainly was not aware that this had been withheld.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just for clarity, the Butler Committee were given a very long list of documents from which they could request to see the text. This was on that list. They didn't choose to ask for it, but it was not volunteered to them that this report or these reports had significant and useful information. So it was neither

withheld nor, as it were, volunteered as being of obvious interest to them.

SIS2: I don't know what the thinking behind that decision was, but I suspect it reflected the perception that the information was not seen as particularly significant.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A couple of other questions.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?⁵

SIS2: I think it pretty much was, yes. As I said in response to an earlier question, I think certainly by the middle of 2002, it was pretty obvious [REDACTED] what the American agenda was. They did not seek to dissemble in any sense.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So do you think that clear evidence that Iraq did not have WMD would have made a difference to the Americans.

SIS2: [REDACTED].

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: I think the US Government had a very clear and explicit agenda of regime change in Iraq. There were two new areas of information that were seen as bearing on that.

⁵ Baroness Prashar referred to material in the public domain that suggested that nothing was going to stop the US on its course to military action and asked the witness whether this was also his view.

One was WMD. The other was allegation of a relationship between the Saddam Hussein regime and Al Qaeda.

Now, we knew absolutely that there was no such relationship, although there were those in the American administration who sought very energetically to argue [REDACTED] that this was in fact the case.

So, you know, if there are two areas which might have impacted on the American decision, the way in which they handled one of them, the relationship with Al Qaeda is, I think, indicative of what their real intentions were.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

SIS2: [REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIS2: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]?

SIS2: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIS2: [REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we could go on to the dossier. Presumably, given your role in SIS, you were quite involved in the process aspects of that at least.

What was the response of SIS to the suggestion of the dossier on the WMD programmes that would draw upon SIS

intelligence?

SIS2: I think it's fair to say that there was not enormous enthusiasm for this undertaking, and within certain quarters of the service, quite a lot of concern about an exercise that was going to put potentially so much secret material into the public domain. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]⁶

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What issues do you think might have come up in [REDACTED] discussion?

SIS2: I think if we had had a [REDACTED] discussion before going into this, the issue that I referred to earlier of our prime risk on the service's risk register would have come into focus and would have been a subject of some discussion. The worry that if this did not go well, it might lead to a loss of confidence in the service, was, you know, a prime risk [REDACTED] and, as I said, I don't think that was properly addressed at the time.

Obviously other issues would have arisen. I suspect at the end of the day, however -- maybe I shouldn't be too much drawn into hypothetical scenarios, but I'm not aware that there would have been any mechanism or rationale whereby we could at the end of the day have refused to take part in such an undertaking. After all, we were an agency of Government, and it was Government that wished to do this.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the question of the exposure of

SIS could have been (1) in terms of whether the quality of your information was good enough.

SIS2: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And (2) being seen to endorse a particular foreign policy.

SIS2: Well, I don't think that involvement in the dossier would necessarily have been interpreted as supporting a particular foreign policy. It wasn't for SIS to make judgments about what was --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that turned out to be a risk.

SIS2: Indeed it was, but it wasn't for SIS --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You don't think that was the one that -- it was more a question of the effect on your sources of information and how you were perceived in terms of the intelligence provider?

SIS2: That would have been a concern. I think the appropriateness of the exercise would certainly have been an issue that might have been discussed. But as I said, at the end of the day, SIS collected the intelligence for HMG. It's not as if we had separate ownership of this product.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you get reassurances from Number 10 about how the exercise would be conducted?

SIS2: At the end of the day, we did in terms of an assurance that nothing would be put in that dossier if we were absolutely convinced that it would be a mistake to

⁶ The witness commented that, in retrospect, there should have been fuller discussions, at as senior level, in SIS about the dossier.

do so, that it would jeopardise sensitive sources or methods or otherwise compromise capabilities. That assurance was given on a number of occasions.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And was stuff excluded on that basis?

SIS2: At the end of the day, I don't believe it was.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]:

" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]."⁷

So two questions first come from that. One, what was the SIS role and what were the suspicions?

SIS2: Without looking at that particular document, I struggle to put that in context. But I assume that the SIS role would be about making sure that the information that went into the dossier was the best that it could be, so to speak, and was as complete in terms of the picture as we could make it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you aware of concerns from the Cabinet Office about the quality of the intelligence?

SIS2: Actually no, I wasn't.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did they think you were withholding anything? Were you aware of that sort of issue?

⁷ Sir Lawrence referred to evidence, dating from the end of September 2002, that showed that there had been good co-operation between the SIS counter-proliferation team and the Cabinet Office, despite what some in SIS had perceived as initial suspicions within the Cabinet Office about SIS' role.

SIS2: If they were, they didn't say anything to me about that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It says there had been excellent co-operation. So as far as you were concerned, it was fine?

SIS2: As I said, there were certainly some concerns on the SIS side about the way in which so much material was being put into the public domain, but that was the main concern of which I was aware.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And how actively were SIS people involved in the drafting process? Admitting text, commenting on text and so on?

SIS2: They were, of course, inevitably. There was a lot of interchange. Again, I would struggle to provide an exact chronology for that. It was going on pretty much the whole time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So they were closely involved?

SIS2: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you recall any particular concerns about language in the dossier, whether it was going too far, too simplistic, whatever?

SIS2: I think there were from the outset concerns that subsequently became articulated in the Butler Report about the extent to which the intelligence could support some of the judgments that were being made. That's certainly the case, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you recall any particular

examples of that?

SIS2: Not off the top of my head. I'm afraid I would have to go back in great more detail than I have been able to do.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it would be quite helpful, if you did get a chance.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]:

" [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]"⁸

[REDACTED] what impact did you think it had on the production of the dossier?

SIS2: Well, of course it was a serious problem. A shortage of expertise was a problem right across the piece, and you have to bear in mind that we are talking about a service that had been reduced [REDACTED] in the preceding decade. We were stretched pretty thin almost everywhere. In terms of the Iraqi WMD, as I mentioned earlier, the fact that so much of the waterfront during the 1990s had been occupied by an inspection regime with access incomparably better than anything SIS could have replicated, was also a factor. So we were not well placed in terms of expertise when this issue arose again in the way that it did.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm just wondering what effect this had on your ability to validate the intelligence that you were taking forward. Were you able to give the warning, the care notices that this intelligence might have needed

⁸ Sir Lawrence referred to evidence suggesting pressure on SIS resources in relation to Iraqi WMD.

to your customers?

SIS2: Well, I think, as this exercise gathered momentum, there was -- and I'm sure others will have made this comment -- very substantial pressure to generate new intelligence because at this juncture, fresh intelligence, new intelligence was at a premium and was in very short supply. So there was undoubtedly considerable pressure to generate new sources, new insights, and we were, in all honesty, not well placed to do that. Our access to Iraq was no better than it was. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So essentially the position was that until the end of 1998, you had relied on UNSCOM.

SIS2: Not entirely.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And UNSCOM of course had had quite a good relationship with intelligence. Then you don't have it anymore. Iraq is not a big priority. Iraq becomes a big priority during the course of 2002. Almost immediately, you are expected to provide a dossier, which doesn't actually give you an awful lot of time to develop your resources. So essentially it takes place at a time when you are sort of scrambling around to find people. In the chronology that's quite important.

Did you feel that after the dossier, when some more material was coming in, were you comfortable that this was improving your position significantly, or did you think it was still showing this problem of stretch that you have

referred to?

SIS2: I think we were still showing signs of stretch, and I think there were concerns that some of the newer material was, so to speak, being torn off the teleprinter and rushed across to Number 10 with, shall we say, a little more haste than was probably appropriate.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were all these concerns made known?

SIS2: Yes, to a degree, but I don't think it actually influenced behaviour.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So in a sense it was pressure to reinforce conclusions that had been reached, material coming through which seemed to do so, enthusiasm to --

SIS2: There was certainly -- indeed, there was certainly obviously a desire to try and find more and better intelligence, but I think that what that translated into was undue haste to make that intelligence available to policy makers, whereas in retrospect obviously it would be better if some of it had been held back and subjected to greater analysis than was in fact the case.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was this still a problem even when ISG was up and running? Were you still concerned that you lacked the resources to get as good a grip as you would like on this problem?

SIS2: Well, can you remind me when ISG was actually set up?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was set up after the war.

SIS2: I think at that point the service was dealing with

multiple pressures. We had had, I like to think, a pretty good war in terms of providing intelligence support for British forces in the south of the country, the battle for Basra and all that kind of thing. That was an intelligence-led success. So all of that had gone well for us.

But after that, we were faced with the need to provide an intelligence presence in Iraq of uncertain purpose and uncertain duration, in circumstances where the initial post-Saddam euphoria fairly rapidly deteriorated into significant instability and violence. So we were having to deal with all of these things simultaneously.

But at the same time there was, of course, enormous pressure to look for evidence of WMD in the post-conflict environment, and that took up a significant, and I think at the time it was perceived, disproportionate amount of effort.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much.

Just a final question on the dossier. The further dossier, the dodgy one, that had an SIS input. But SIS were not particularly involved -- is that correct -- in its production?

SIS2: We were not, absolutely not, and I think we were rather shocked by the outcome of this. It was certainly not the case that we had been closely involved in the preparation of that document.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the first you were aware of it was ...?

SIS2: To be honest, I can't remember when I first became aware of it, but I think it may actually have been when it came out. Certainly not much before.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Just moving on, I'm interested in the general role of SIS in the Government information strategy prior to the conflict.

Could you perhaps just briefly describe the relationship [SIS] had with Number 10, leaving aside the question of the production of the dossier, in terms of the support that [SIS] were providing to the communication strategy?

SIS2: Well, we did have regular links with Alastair Campbell, who was the then Director of Communications at Number 10, and we found Alastair Campbell, I think, an enthusiastic individual, but also somewhat of an unguided missile. From the outset we had concerns [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] That was an issue that was raised periodically. We also, I think, suffered from his propensity to have rushes of blood to the head and pass various stories and information to journalists without appropriate prior consultation.

That's not to say that we didn't engage to the extent that we could, and I think that Alastair Campbell found us a useful organisation to work with, simply because SIS was actually an organisation that was very focused on delivery,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There have been some suggestions that Number 10 -- I think indeed it may even have been said by it -- that SIS was seen in the way you have described as more resourceful in these matters than the Foreign Office.

Did you sense perhaps that you were filling a gap that the FCO had created?

SIS2: Well, certainly there was a gap where the FCO supposedly should have been. I think it was very much the case that the Foreign Office's inclination in all of this was -- and it's certainly what happened -- was to take a back seat, to the extent that -- I think I'm right in saying there was an instruction to the effect that no post-invasion planning should be undertaken for fear that that might be seen as implying some degree of approval for such an outcome.

So yes, I think it was the general -- I may be being unfair to the Foreign Office here, but I think the general perception was that they were by and large not sitting in the councils of state when a lot of this pre-invasion discussion and deliberation was taking place.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So when you had an SIS chat with the -- maybe it was you -- Alastair Campbell's meetings, were the Foreign Office present?

SIS2: It was never me. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I don't know whether there was an FCO person present.

[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, you mentioned the role

Campbell played with intelligence. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. How was the aftermath of that managed? Did that affect the relationship you had with Campbell particularly?

SIS2: No, not especially. I think we made our point. He accepted our points, undertook to do better and moved on. I don't think there was any lasting impact from that particular episode.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you providing briefings to journalists as well?

SIS2: ⁹ [REDACTED]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just looking back at this whole episode, are there lessons that you would draw for SIS in terms of the role you can play in the public domain, in the political arena?

⁹ The witness explained SIS' approach to engaging with the media.

SIS2: Well, as I said, in large measure what SIS was doing was in conformity with its role and functions. There was nothing anomalous or in my view incorrect in that regard.

I think this is one of these situations where, as the lawyers put it, hard cases make bad law. Obviously one needs to look at a situation like this and to consider whether there are indeed lessons that should be learned. I think that, certainly before engaging in anything like this in the future, the service does need to have a much more structured and strategic dialogue at all levels to consider thoroughly the implications of this kind of activity, and I would certainly argue for that in the future.

[REDACTED]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

this was not a welcome message that was coming. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the other Islamic extremists who were making ground in Iraq and making common cause with the Ba'athists, did this come as a surprise, given their different ideologies?

SIS2: Are you talking here about Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, ISI, the various acronyms under which it became known? Not especially, no. I think this was a classic case of opportunism and a coincidence of interests.

I think the intensity of the violence to which this gave rise was initially a shock, and it took a while, I think, to appreciate how all this was wired together. But I think it came as no -- in terms of the Sunni, it came as no great surprise.

I think the Shia in the south was another question. The emergence of Muqtada al-Sadr, that was probably more of a surprise because Muqtada is essentially more mercurial and difficult to predict as an individual.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the Sunni insurgency, can you give us perhaps a clearer picture of when this became clear? Witnesses have given us evidence that in a sense it was quite a long delayed process.

SIS2: To be honest, I do have a problem with dates and I'm trying to -- I think by the summer of 2003 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] something more serious and structured was going on. This was not just general lawlessness.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the assessments of the Iranian impact, originally, I believe, our assessment was that Iran had not ordered attacks on coalition forces, although it had provided military training to Iraqis, and later we found that Iran had provided arms to the Shia insurgents.

With hindsight, how accurate do you believe our first assessments were?

SIS2: Well, of course, it's very difficult to answer that question absolutely because Iran's position was changing all the time. It was never fixed.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But I think the general perception was that Iraqis were Iraqi nationalists first and Shia second, so to speak, and I don't think that that essential judgment was incorrect.

But, of course, the Iranians did have very substantial scope to influence events in Iraq, and as the situation unfolded, and I think the vulnerabilities of the coalition became more evident, so Iran itself became emboldened and willing to countenance greater levels of risk, albeit within limits. The Iranian involvement was always, I think, quite carefully calibrated to ensure that -- to minimise the risk of a smoking gun being detected.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there more we could have done to deter Iranian participation?

SIS2: Well, not invade Iraq. Flippancy aside, I think it

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: As we approach the end, I would just like to look over some of the broader brush questions, some of which you have already very helpfully touched on.

If I can just start with the question of validation. What went wrong, in your view, with the validation of intelligence such that some important reports had subsequently to be withdrawn because it turned out that they were from agents who were not accurate or authoritative?

SIS2: I think it was simply down to the very febrile atmosphere within which this collection process was taking place. The pressure to generate results, I fear, did lead to the cutting of corners.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And this had gone back a certain time, because some of these lines of reporting had gone back well before the febrile year of 2002.

SIS2: I think some of the problems there -- [REDACTED] what we did not have was good agents reporting on Iraq who were as knowledgeable about the WMD programmes as we would have wished. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] they did their best, but, as it turns out, their best was not good enough.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have referred a couple of times to

the risk register. You have referred to your view that there should have been a more structured and strategic dialogue about to Iraq at board level, including about the dossier, but I think not only about the dossier. I wonder if you could enlarge on this.

Was the policy operated in a way that was too personalised?

SIS2: Yes. I think there was an element of that. I think there were discussions going on at Number 10 which, I mentioned earlier, were taking place in a very quick moving situation, but -- yes, I think perhaps SIS was at that point guilty of flying a bit too close to the sun.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In effect it crossed a line between its traditional roles of providing information and carrying out instructions that you have talked about earlier, and it actually got sucked into the process of policy making?

SIS2: Not exactly policy making as such, but perilously close to it, I would say. I think a fair criticism would be that we were probably too eager to please.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And how would you counteract that? Do you think steps have since been taken that make this less likely to happen in the future?

SIS2: I don't think you can ever entirely inoculate yourself against this particular virus, but yes, certainly, as things stand at the moment, I think it would be more difficult for this kind of situation to arise.

In 2005, when the new chief of the service took over, board structures were very deliberately and board culture

was very deliberately redesigned, I think to ensure that more systematic process was injected into these issues, thereby minimising the likelihood of something like this happening again. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIS2: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Could you introduce an element of challenge to it, of somebody who was specifically there to be the guardian of the ark of the principles of SIS, or has that got to be done from outside?

SIS2: Well, I don't think there is a single way of dealing with this.

Two aspects here. Firstly, the composition of the SIS board was significantly expanded, and by design, to inject more outside views. So there are two or three people on board who are not career intelligence officers, have different perspectives, and are expected to ask the, so to speak, commonsense questions. That's one area where

I think a greater degree of control has to be exercised.

But I think also the oversight mechanisms that exist have a role to play there as well in terms of challenge and asking questions about what things are done and why they are done.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: May I just turn briefly to the relationship in this period between SIS and the Foreign Office?

[REDACTED] Other witnesses have described the way in which [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Washington [REDACTED] were leading in a particular direction over Iraq, whereas the Foreign Office clearly was not heading in that direction,

[REDACTED]. Both Colin Powell and Jack Straw were working until a very late stage for different outcomes that might even have been an effective prolongation or some form of containment or whatever, but not necessarily regime change ultimately achieved through military action. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

How did this gap arise?

SIS2: Well, the honest answer is I don't know. But it certainly was there, and I think we ended up with a situation in which we had Jack Straw and Colin Powell as the kind of [REDACTED] opposition, [REDACTED], but not really engaging in the substantive debate with the people who were driving forward the policy

that we know was in the ascendant in Washington.

How did this come about? Well, I think that what we saw was a disinclination, a kind of institutional disinclination by the Foreign Office to associate itself with anything that looked as if it was heading in the direction of a military invasion of Iraq, and in my view they overcompensated. Rather than being in the councils of state and voicing their concerns, they, to all intents and purposes, elected to sit things out, and I think there was an element of reluctance to confront the signs that were there. As late as early 2003, the Foreign Office was still querying [REDACTED] that the Americans were on a course from which they could not be dissuaded.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did this create awkwardness for SIS? On the one hand you were getting instructions fairly directly from Number 10; on the other hand your sponsoring Minister, the Foreign Secretary, who you approach through the Deputy Undersecretary for Defence and Intelligence, at the time, I think, Stephen Wright, were pointing in a different direction. Did that make life awkward for you?

SIS2: It probably should have done, but I think that there was, if I may say, an element of hubris at work which made us less sensitive to that than we probably ought to have been.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think our time is more or less at an end at this point.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

" [REDACTED] "

Can I ask you finally if there are any further thoughts that you would like to impart to us, any questions perhaps we should have asked you but have failed to ask you, and in particular on the role of your service at this time and lessons that should be learned from the episode?

SIS2: Well, if I had to make one overarching and general observation, I would say that SIS, in my experience, is an organisation that [REDACTED]

I think this is probably a factor in the way the Service reacted to events in Iraq, translating into, probably, a greater desire to please than might have been entirely appropriate. It was in my view an understandable overcompensation, but one which I think SIS does need to think quite hard about, and actually I would suggest the

Government more generically needs to think about, in terms of the kind of capability that it wants and the role that it ought to play.

[REDACTED] I think [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] it is very unfortunate that this issue should have become so predominant in evaluating the service's performance, because it certainly, in my view, does not give a correct or accurate assessment of what the organisation is or what it does. But it is there, and the lessons do have to be learned.

As I said, I think the whole question of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and what that means for the organisation, is one that requires a lot of thought.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, thank you very much indeed. I think we have now concluded. As I said, the transcript in due course will be available. You can come back and sign that. We would be very grateful.

SIS2: Of course.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you for taking the time and trouble and being so very frank with us.

(The hearing concluded)